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**ARCHEOLOGIC EXPLORATIONS IN MICHOACAN,
MEXICO.**

BY F. PLANCARTE.

NOTE.—The following notes relate to a very interesting exploration of archeologic remains conducted by Prof. F. Plancarte of the College of San Joaquin, Tacuba, Mexico, in the year 1889. A series of objects of gold, copper, shell, stone, and pyrites, together with a set of eight photographs of articles of metal, clay, and stone, were forwarded to me for examination. The translation is not a literal one, being a compilation from several letters, but expresses the facts with sufficient clearness and detail.

W. H. HOLMES.

“The site of my excavations was a slight elevation almost at the southern extremity of the valley of Zamora, four miles southwest of the city of that name and two miles west of the present site of the Indian village of Tacona. This eminence is composed of two natural hills, called in local phrase ‘The Great Cat’ and ‘The Little Cat.’

“Being a student of American antiquities, and especially of those of my own country, I wished to make some excavations in order to obtain authentic specimens with which I might form a small archeologic collection to serve as a basis for my study of this science, and I chose the spot referred to because I had heard from the workmen of the region that at one time great cinerary urns of earthenware had been found in the skirts of the hills.

“Repairing to the place, I found on the principal hill, on a little plateau forming its top, a conical tumulus from four and a half to five meters in height by eight meters at the base, which communicated by an embankment with another elevation of square form having a base about equal to the diameter of the cone and of the same height. I began the excavations at the cone and shortly stumbled on a clay tripod. Continuing in the same direction, there were found walls made of cobble-stones not held together by mortar or cementing matter of any kind. These walls formed a square in the interior of the cone, which was filled with human skeletons at equal distances from each other and on the same plane; but, either

because the sepulchral chamber had been covered with wood and reed matting supporting earth and stones which fell down on the bodies when the wood decayed, or because the earth and stones were thrown on the bodies at first, the bones were commingled with débris, and many of them were reduced to powder and a large part of the earthenware was broken.

“It was not possible to examine the bones minutely, because they crumbled to powder on contact with the air; but the greater number of the teeth discovered, especially the molars, indicated adults considerably advanced in age.

“In a corner of the square enclosure there was a small structure of burned brick, which contained various bones in part carbonized or calcined; among them parts of the cranium (the parietal bones—the occipital and frontal), parts of tibias, ribs, femur, etc., of a single skeleton. On the fragment of cranium no trace of suture is seen between the parietals, and the molars, almost flat on the surface, indicated the great age of the deceased. In this enclosure, amid some half-carbonized utensils and shell ornaments, instruments of copper and earthen vessels, I found the gold films or plating and some five or six fragments of gilded beads, all mingled with ashes, pieces of coal, and carbonized remains of textiles. Skeletons were found not only in the walled enclosure of the cone, but also outside of it, among them being the remains of a young child. Mingled with the bodies were remnants of wood and matting which probably belonged to the roof. Quite close to the crania I found a very thin coating of a red substance which I took to be the coloring matter that served to paint the face of the dead.

“All of the objects found could not be got out entire and many crumbled on contact with the air. This is true especially of articles of copper and shell. Various utensils of red and black earthenware were found. The designs on some are very simple, consisting of circles and semicircles. The greater part of these utensils are basins resting on three hollow feet which are furnished with small balls of stone or clay to produce a sound when shaken. One shows complicated and handsome designs in white, red, and black. Many other articles may be briefly enumerated: A clay pipe, representing the human figure; a musical instrument, also of clay, with a human figure at one end (fig. 2); another musical instrument of Mexican onyx; a small idol of clay (fig. 4); an idol of white onyx (fig. 3), 17.7 centimeters high, whose eyes are of an artificial blue paste,

and the two pupils and the corners of the lips of obsidian ; a vessel with a human head in relief on the outside, also of onyx ; three fish-hooks, four needles, many arrow-heads, hawk-bells of all sizes, a great number of little tubes, probably beads, a chaplet of very small beads, four tongs of various sizes, and numerous other objects, all of copper ; a unique necklace of iron pyrites, some beads of which I send you ; seven necklaces, one of small snail shells and the others of pectens and other varieties of shells, are included, together with many tubes made of some marine mollusk, and a *Busycon perversum* entire and without artificial work. There are many other kinds of ornaments and utensils of shell, the greater part of them closely resembling those described in your work on 'Art in Shell of the Ancient Americans.'



Objects of clay and stone obtained from a small mound, Michoacan, Mexico.

“An obsidian mirror polished on one side, circular in form, backed with an earthenware slab of the same diameter, and with the hollows of the imperfections on the unpolished part, which touches the slab, filled with soot, is interesting. Two hatchets of stone, three lance-heads, some arrow-heads, and some knives of obsidian may be added. Some vessels contained vegetal matter destined for food, and in others there were found lumps and dust of red and rose colored material.

“The excavations made on the contiguous pyramids showed hori-

zontal sheets of ashes and burnt earth a few centimeters in thickness, separated from each other by thicker layers of earth, without earthenware fragments or other articles. This led me to suppose that the monument was an altar.

“The skeleton found in the small angular enclosure of the mortuary chamber of the cone may be assumed to be that of the chief; the others within might be those of his kin and friends who were killed to keep him company in the other life, and those outside of the enclosure might be the remains of captives and slaves sacrificed while the funeral pyre was burning in the ceremony of the obsequies.

“The great moisture of the place and the action of time have completely destroyed most of the gilded objects, leaving only the plates or films, which I found in rather large numbers; a very few fragments of beads still retain the gilding. The material is crude earthenware, in some cases burnt, not in an oven, but in the fire that served for the burning of the body with which they had been buried and whose carbonized bones were found in the tomb.

“Excepting the bead fragments, plated with a thin film of gold, there is nothing in this sepulcher that might throw doubt on its pre-Columbian character. No trace was found of glass beads or of the numberless trinkets used in trade by the Spaniards or paid for services rendered them.

“This fact and the many vexations inflicted by the whites at the time of the conquest upon the Indians of Xacona—the province having been granted to the notorious Nuño de Guzman—forbid the idea that these sepulchers were built after European had been substituted for American art. The theory of the European origin of the gold-plating becomes still less plausible as the history of the conquest and colonization of Michoacan is better understood, when it is considered that before the middle of the 16th century all the Indians of these regions had embraced Christianity and were subject to the intolerance and excessive religious zeal of the Spaniards of that epoch. In subsequent centuries, when Christian customs had already taken root among the Indians, surrounded as they were on all sides by convents and by forts and farms of Spaniards, they could not easily have eluded the suspicious vigilance of the monks, soldiers, and landlords in celebrating rites of the nature of those that probably took place at the burial of the bodies found, which, as they required some time and preparation, could not have passed

unperceived in a place like 'The Cats,' open to the view of all the Spaniards, who in considerable number inhabited the surrounding treeless region.

"Neither can modern fraud be suspected, because I myself was present and actively inspected the work in company with Mr. Hunt, an American friend of mine, a lover of antiquities and well conversant with the Mexican language, so that there was no chance of deception by the workmen, who, moreover, had no motive for deceiving. In these regions the importance of ancient objects is so little known that all thought I was looking for nothing but treasure under the pretext of seeking antiquities, nobody being able to comprehend that the broken potsherds I brought to light had any value. To my mind there is not the least doubt that this gilding was a pre-Spanish art, and Mr. Hunt's conviction is the same.

"In another small elevation at the foot of the hill where I made the first excavations a skull was found with filed teeth. There were countless numbers of pieces of earthenware and three large cinerary urns which contained ashes without a trace of bones. In these, perhaps, were deposited, according to the reported custom of the ancient Tarascans, the residue from combustion of the remains of warriors killed in battle. In one of these urns, the only one that could be preserved, remnants of painted figures were found. Here, as in the first tumulus, there was a square stone enclosure, and in its center were placed the urns in a row parallel with the east and west sides. Under a skeleton in the northeast angle I found fifty clay utensils of similar form, placed one above the other, the lower being larger than the upper. The central vase was accompanied by four others of various sizes and of the same figure.

"I send also some objects of copper and of shell from among those found. A shell tube and a copper cylinder still retains the carbonized or oxidized fragment of string that served to attach these ornaments to the garment or person. Special attention is due, in my opinion, to the small copper beads, which, mingled with bells, formed a collar. Of these I send you specimens, as well as others of shell and other material, together with the trinkets that were tied to them. There is an object of shell in the form of a semicircular band with two small holes at the free ends for suspension. The exterior surface is ornamented with three button-like nodes. In the museum of Morelia I saw similar objects, but at no other place.

“In the future I shall send you such things as I find, either in photograph or, if possible, the objects themselves, and you may rest assured that I shall send you nothing the authenticity of which is not sufficiently established. Unfortunately many persons, especially in the Capital, busy themselves in the fabrication of ancient objects, and for this reason I place no trust in any one but myself or in persons who can have no possible interest in deceiving me.”

INDIANA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE.—At the eighth annual meeting of the Indiana Academy of Science, held in Indianapolis, December 28 and 29, the following papers of anthropologic interest were read :

Evidences of man's early existence in Indiana, from the oldest river gravels along the White Water river, by A. W. Butler.

The Crawford mound, by H. M. Stoops.

Notes on archeology in Mexico, by J. T. Scovell.

Ancient earthworks near Anderson, Indiana, by F. A. Walker.

Archeology near Tippecanoe county, by O. J. Craig.

Some Indian camping sites near Brookville, by A. W. Butler.

Remarkable prehistoric relic, by E. Pleas.

The mounds of Brookville township, Franklin county, Indiana, by H. M. Stoops.

Remarks on archeological map making, by A. W. Butler.

STONE-AXE CURRENCY IN BRITISH NEW GUINEA.—Although the native canoe-builders in the Louisiade archipelago work with adzes made of hoop-iron, the payment for their work is made in stone axes, ten to fifty of these being the price of a canoe. The stone axe is still the accepted medium of exchange in large transactions—pigs, for instance, and wives are valued in that currency. It is only fair, by the way, to mention that the purchase of a wife is stated by the natives not to be such in the ordinary sense ; the articles paid are, they say, a present to the girl's father. In Mowatta, sisters are specially valued, as they can be interchanged with other men's sisters as wives.—Trotter in *Proc. Roy. Geog. Soc.*, p. 795, Nov., 1892.